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AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT LANCASTER,

FEBRUARY 21, 1826.

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary

OF THE

Destruction of that town by the Indians.

BY ISAAC GOODWIN.

WORCESTER :

ROGERS & GRIFFIN.....PRINTERS.

1826.

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ORATION.

ONE hundred and fifty annual revolutions of the Sun have this day completed their circuit, since these beautiful plains were desolated by a cruel and unrelenting foe. The event marks a distinct era in our annals, and its anniversary is worthy of solemn commemoration. From the sad recitals of that melancholy day, the heart of sensibility shrinks away intuitively, nor have we come hither only to feast the imagination upon those barbarous spectacles. But, we assemble to pay a tribute of grateful remembrance to the memory of our fathers: to consider the great things they, under the guidance of the Almighty, have done for us: to contemplate their multiplied toils and sufferings on our behalf: to trace the progress of our nation from its humble beginnings to its present exalted state of glory and happiness: to inquire from whence has arisen the fair and splendid fabric of social order and domestic quiet that protects our rights and cheers our hearts: to consider what is our duty as men and citizens: and what is the return we are to render for all these blessings. We have assembled where civilization, and learning, and Christianity were first planted in our flourishing and wide spread County, then an uncultivated waste and a howling wilderness. We behold the spot where our interesting local history commenced; where a remnant of the Pilgrim band, who fled across the Ocean, the exiled heralds of truth, the champions of the Cross, the asserters of the rights of conscience, the fugitives from oppression, set the bounds of their habitations, and found a refuge from their persecutors, and a home for their children.

The history of our State is divided into four great periods or distinct eras, each comprising a space of half a century, and each commencing with some signal event connected with our glory and prosperity, and apparently essential to our national existence.

Dating back two hundred years from the point where we now stand, we find the settlers at Plymouth had just obtained a permanent footing in the land, and had surmounted the peculiar obstacles incident to a colonial settlement upon new and original principles, on an untried soil, and in a climate to which Englishmen had been unaccustomed. At this juncture, we behold, from every part of the European continent, that illustrious band of Confessors, who had suffered from the persecutions of the British hierarchy, beginning to look to the western world for refuge and rest. The forlorn hope had been successful, and the ranks of the centre column were now filled with men of opulence and learning, prepared to found a powerful and lasting state. Endicott, and Winthrop, and Johnson, with their illustrious compeers, "the sacramental host of God's elect," immediately begin to plant the settlements around Massachusetts Bay, and to subdue the wilderness beyond. In a few years the plantations had extended to this memorable spot, and as the emigrations from England had ceased, here were their limits. An uninterrupted peace prevailed, and their numbers and their power greatly increased.

The second period commences with the Indian war with Philip in 1675-6. This contest scattered desolation and death through all the frontier settlements, and jeopardized the very existence of the Colony. It was followed by a series of similar conflicts, for the precise period of fifty years, until the treaty made with the Indians at Casco bay in 1726. This was literally a period of blood. The sufferings of the settlers were intense. A numerous foe was continually hovering upon the frontiers, and the deadly blow of their vengeance was seldom foreseen until it was felt. The progress of the settlements was suspended. More than 6,000 of the inhabitants had fallen by the sword. Many of the most flourishing towns were entirely broken up. A large public debt was accumulated. But the calamities of the public were trifling when compared with the miseries of the individual sufferers. "Their days were made heavy with anxiety, and their nights restless with visions of horror." Their distempered imaginations constantly presented to their minds the sounds of savage yells in the howlings of the tempest, and the whispers of prowling assassins in every rustling leaf. The corruscations of the meteor were the lighting up of distant conflagrations, and their dreams were of wandering captivity, and of victims writhing in agony and expiring in torment.

The third period, from the peace of 1726, is marked by a series

of encroachments upon the rights of the people by the royal Governors, and of resistance upon the part of the oppressed. It little sufficed to satiate the demands of his Majesty's minions, that the people of Massachusetts had voluntarily expended their best blood and dearest treasures in extending the empire of their Sovereign, and in humbling his proud rival, France, by the reduction of Louisburg, and the conquest of the Canadas. It excited no relents of tyranny, that one fifth of our population capable of bearing arms, was for successive years exposed to the horrors of the camp and the dangers of the field. No! they were called to submit to measures the most odious, to principles subversive of their dearest rights and their chartered privileges. Blessed be God, the spirit that led our Fathers across the deep, still lived in the bosoms of their descendants. They resisted even unto blood, and the Independence of a great empire was the result of this resistance. The year 1776 marks the fourth era, the proudest in the annals of civilized man. Since that period another half century has been added to the accumulating mass of years. It will ever be distinguished for its brilliant train of momentous events. It has beheld the consummation of our Independence, the establishment of our federative form of government, and the practical illustration of the principles of our fathers. It has beheld our beloved country rising with gigantic steps into maturity, and displaying to an astonished world the blessings of good government, and of opinions unshackled by law.

We are now entering upon the fifth epoch in our annals. It commences at a period of unexampled national prosperity, when our country, and those with whom she is connected, are in a state of profound peace; when Commerce, and her sisters, Agriculture and Manufactures, are rapidly extending and improving, and, mutually protected by the parental care of the government, are reciprocally supporting each other, and pouring into the lap of their common mother the surplus of their abundance. Our times will also be distinguished, at least from all that have preceded it, for the singular circumstance, that our rulers are conducting the affairs of the country, and discussing questions of the highest importance to their constituents, uninfluenced by the bitterness of organized parties, and the confusion of contending factions.

Our history acquires importance by time, and the apparent magnitude of its incidents increases in proportion as we recede from them. This has awakened a laudable curiosity to discover an ade-

quate cause for the mighty effects that we witness around us—this can only be found in the principles of our Ancestors, and their results have been gradually unfolding, through all the successive years of our story. Anniversary celebrations, by presenting a knowledge of their events to the rising generations, have been found the most effectual means of aiding the records of the historian, and of recalling the feelings and principles they are intended to commemorate.

We hear with the keenest interest the story of our father's wrongs in their native land; we sympathise in those sufferings and trials that induced them to abandon forever their native fields. Conscience had issued her stern mandates, and the Puritans were not the men to disregard her solemn injunctions. We follow them with their wives and their children to the strand in full view of the perils of a tempestuous ocean. How have our hearts been elevated with hope or depressed by anxiety as we traced their lonely ship across the billows of an untried sea; the *Mayflower* cradled like the lone sea bird on the mountain wave, but laden with blessings that other gallant ship never bore; with the constituent principles of an empire beyond the seas; the germ of a government, from whence would spring civil and religious liberty, such as men had never before enjoyed, destined to spread its branches from the sea to the rivers, to protect and solace the millions, who would repose in its shade. The tie that bound the Pilgrim to his native land was now severed forever; what remained to him of earth was now within his view; the relics of property reserved from the grasp of avarice and tyrannical exaction; family and friends were now before him. But he had in expectancy a bright reversion in the wilderness beyond the seas, more valued than the cultivated plains of England, even a home where he could worship his God without molestation or terror; and he had, moreover, a yet brighter hope beyond the skies, dearer to him, than all the loved objects around him, or than all that earth could give. We follow our fathers in their wanderings around our coast, a coast at that inclement season, terrible by its ice clad rocks and snowy cliffs. We accompany them in their landing upon an inhospitable shore, dreary, houseless, and forlorn. We contemplate with reverence and admiration that stern resolution, that holy self denial, and that exemplary patience, which enabled them to persevere, and to place the lasting foundations of their State, through so many hardships, the dread of savage beasts and ferocious men, famine, pestilence, and death.

Where is the American, who has not felt a glow of enthusiasm in listening to a recital of those events that led to our national emancipation? Who can contemplate without emotion that illustrious band of Sages, Patriots, and Statesmen, who adopted the high resolve, that the American people were free and independent, and who through a dubious struggle redeemed the pledge they had given to the world, that they would consecrate to the noble cause "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honors."

These two events, although the most prominent in our history, and most frequently the themes of panegyric, were connected by a series of other incidents equally interesting, and if less splendid and imposing, will be found equally necessary to the consummation of our glory as a nation.

At the landing of our fathers, most of the places where they settled were entirely abandoned and destitute of inhabitants. Numerous vestiges of a former population remained, but those parts of the country had been desolated by a sweeping pestilence some years previous to the arrival of the English. Whenever any of the natives appeared to claim jurisdiction of the soil, treaties were entered into, and equal and honorable bargains were made for the lands. If, in any instances, the case was otherwise, the fault was not that of our fathers, for they then were weak and the Indians were strong. These contracts were mutually fulfilled during the lives of the contracting parties. By the immemorial usages of mankind, however erroneous and unjust, these purchases were unnecessary and altogether gratuitous, for without them, our claim to the soil was acquired by titles as fair and as indisputable as the domains of any other civilized nation. These bargains have been applauded by the most eminent writers upon the laws of nations, even by the French jurists,* as exemplary instances of moderation, and of a regard to equal and exact justice. If it is inquired whether the Indian tribes were parties to these conventional laws of nations, we answer, that by their own rules of acquiring and holding property, that of immediate and actual occupancy, our right is at least as good as theirs. The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; its dominion was granted for the support of his intellectual creatures, and we know of the enactment of no moral law intended to defeat this great purpose of the physical creation.

In this vicinity also, the Indians had been much reduced by the pestilence, and their destructive wars with the Mohawks. Over a

* Vattel—Book I—ch. 18—sect. 209.

considerable region in the valley of the Nashua, Sholan claimed to be the Proprietor. He was Sachem of a tribe, formerly of considerable power, but at this time was tributary to the principal Sagamore of the Massachusetts. He had carried on considerable trade with the settlers of Watertown, for whom he had acquired great friendship. He invited them to occupy this territory, as being a place peculiarly fitted for a plantation. His offers were accepted; and as early as 1643 the purchase was made. It was stipulated that the Indians should not be molested in their hunting grounds, fishing places, and planting fields. For more than thirty years the utmost harmony subsisted between them and the whites. We have no reason to believe that the natives had any cause of complaint against the settlers at Lancaster. In the mean time, Sholan, the friend and protector of our fathers in their weakness, paid the great debt of nature, and was succeeded by Matthew, his nephew, who pursued the same pacific policy towards the English. The next Prince was of an opposite character; he joined with Philip in his rebellion, and afterwards expiated his crimes by an ignominious death. With this unfortunate Sachem, terminated the feeble empire of the Nashuas. The miserable remnant of the tribe dispersed, partly to the vicinity of Albany, and a part united themselves with the more powerful Penicooks.

The sons of the desert were found by our fathers untamed and untutored, sometimes subtle and crafty, and sometimes simple and credulous. Laws were immediately enacted prohibiting any undue advantages upon the part of the whites in trading with them. Purchases of lands from them were void, unless made under the control of the Government. Men of learning and perseverance commenced the benevolent task of rescuing them from their state of barbarity to the cheering light of civilization. The Scriptures and other valued books were translated into their language, a tongue to which the dialects of the learned bore no analogy, and a knowledge of which could only be acquired by submitting in unrepining conformity to savage customs, and brutal modes of living. These pacific measures were completely successful through the whole of the first period of the Massachusetts history.

The Colony of Plymouth bordered upon the Narrhagansett bay. Those beautiful waters studded with a cluster of islands and fertile promontories, were peculiarly fitted for the residence of those children of nature. The western banks were at that time occupied by the warlike tribe of the Narrhagansetts. The Pawkunnawkets

held the opposite shore. They were then governed by Philip, a youthful, gallant and ambitious Prince. A growing and rancorous animosity towards the English had long been cherished in the bosom of this vindictive chief. He possessed sufficient political sagacity to foresee that the superiority of the Whites would soon undermine his power and dispossess him of his domains. His conduct had already awakened suspicions, and his motions were watched by the English. The wily King was at last unable to suggest any plausible reasons for his repeated warlike preparations. Without waiting for his allies, whom he had engaged in a general plot to exterminate the English, this self-willed victim of ambition flew to arms, June 24, 1675.

His depredations commenced in his immediate neighborhood, but the flames of war almost instantaneously extended their ravages into Massachusetts. On the 24th of the following month his Nipmuc subjects made an attack upon Mendon, in this County, and slew several of the Inhabitants. This is said by the historians of that day to have been the first blood shed in the Massachusetts Colony, in a hostile manner. Philip fled before the vengeance of his pursuers, and was an outcast from his dominions for nearly a year. His mind was bent on the blackest deeds, and nothing could glut his vengeance but the blood of his enemies. With the most consummate wiles, he infused his spirit foul and dark into all the neighboring tribes he visited in his exile. In August, the Nasbuas forgetting the ancient friendship of their fathers, consummated by so long an interchange of kind offices, led on by their newly appointed chief, who had imbibed much of the temper of the Prince of the Wampanoags, made a desperate assault upon their neighbors at Lancaster, then in the unguarded and unsuspecting hours of sacred worship, and barbarously slaughtered eight of the citizens.

The governments of the New England colonies were not unconcerned spectators of these outrages upon their borders. In the depth of a severe winter, a well appointed army made a desperate attack upon the strong holds of the powerful and perfidious Narrhagansetts, and achieved a glorious and memorable victory, which manifested that the valor of Cressy, of Agincourt and Poictiers, had not deserted the Saxon race, even in a remote wilderness.

Nothing now was wanting to arouse to the highest pitch of exasperation and frenzy the temper of the savage soul. The council fires were lighted through the wilds of North America, from the shores of the Narrhagansett to the frozen plains of Canada, from

the rivers of Penobscot and Sagadahock to the roar of the cataracts in the West ; from the thickest recesses of their morasses the incantations of their priesthood went forth summoning to arms. The spirits of their fathers howled in the blast, and shrieked for vengeance. The foot of the stranger had polluted their consecrated groves, and had trod the ground hallowed by their sepulchres. The tempest of war moaned in the wilderness ; the rising mists rolled through their vales and settled on all their hills. Gathering blackness and vengeance in its course, the lurid storm was now prepared to burst its fury upon the inhabitants of this devoted spot. The wilderness from her boundless wastes "unfolded her widest gates and poured forth all her Kings." Headed by the master spirit of his race, an army of 1500 savage warriors, in five divisions, commenced their attack in as many several parts of the town. The peaceful slumbers of that ill fated morning were awakened by the horrid din of the war whoop, and the death cry of barbarian ferocity. The dismal glare of domestic conflagration reddened the horizon on every side, and from every glen and hill top around us, resounded the yells of savage vengeance, and the shrieks of the unprotected flying for shelter. Neither arms defended the valiant, nor submission the timid ; neither hoary age nor lisping childhood was spared ; the same blow that pierced the mother, transfixed also the infant in her arms.

The details of that day of carnage and ruin are sufficiently familiar to your minds. Suffice it to say, that most of the unfortified houses were burnt, and the principal garrison, that of their Reverend pastor, was besieged, and after a gallant and vigorous defence, was surrendered, rolling forth devouring fire, agonizing shrieks, the mangled brave, unprotected females, helpless children, the widow and her orphans. From the best authenticated accounts, fifty five of the wretched inhabitants were doomed to death or captivity. One alone of that garrison escaped. Of the miserable survivors, the men were reserved for the horrors of a lingering torture, a fate that no submission, no rewards, entreaties, nor imprecations, nor tears could avert.

Twenty four of the women and children destined for the still more protracted sufferings of savage captivity, were hurried off to a hill, about a mile west of the village. On yonder snow clad eminence, female fortitude was summoned to its severest trials. The cup of human misery was not yet full ; something more appalling was wanted to complete the horrid picture. These wretched fe-

males had beheld their plantation, the fruit of an honorable purchase, its value enhanced by thirty years of toil, endeared to them by a thousand tender recollections, the natal spot of their children, and the sepulchre of many of their venerable fathers, all snatched from them in an unsuspecting moment. They had beheld the ruin of their firesides, their altars and hearths overrun by barbarians, possessed and destroyed by a ruthless foe. They had witnessed their dearest friends falling victims to their valor and exertions in their defence, pouring out their blood like water, and sealing the constancy of their friendship by their precious lives. Night shut in ; and from that memorable height they could distinctly view by the glimmering light of the burning ruins, the rioting of the savages amidst their spoils, feasting upon their plunder, and celebrating their triumph by the most frightful contortions and terrific yells. Nor was this all : the blaze of other fires than those from their ruined dwellings begin to light up the horizon : other sounds more heart-rending than the war whoop or the yells of the savage float upon the evening breeze, and vibrate upon the ears of the disconsolate captives. Wretched wives ! It is no effort of the imagination that informs you whence proceed those shrieks of agony. You have already taken the last farewell of the objects of your dearest affections. Mothers ! Nought avails the courage of your sons ; their heroic valor will no more be displayed upon the high places of the field.

By the light of the morning sun the captives were doomed to take a farewell of their beloved village. Behind was ruin and desolation ; before them were the silent horrors of an interminable forest ; on either side, the taunting savage, triumphing in their distress, mocking at their anguish, and heaping indignities and unspeakable cruelties upon those whose feeble natures were sinking beneath their accumulated sufferings.

Of the awful captivity of nearly three months that ensued, the simple and pathetic details are already familiar to you and your children. The sufferings of the intrepid heroine of that melancholy story, have already been consecrated by the tears of every succeeding generation.* Her fortitude and unwavering faith have called forth the admiration of many a generous and pious heart. Who does not feel an increased veneration for the Holy Oracles of

* The wife of the Rev. Joseph Rowlandson, the minister of the place, was among the Captives. She published a narrative of her sufferings after her return, entitled the "Twenty removes of Mary Rowlandson."

our faith, when we find them mitigating the bitterest griefs, and yielding comfort in the darkest hours of tribulation? Timely aid arrived to rescue the remaining inhabitants of the town, who were conducted to a place of safety, when this, like all the other settlements of the County, was abandoned, and for a long time left in ruins. Silence and desolation again resumed their solitary reign over these beautiful regions. Even the savage foot trod not the neglected fields, and the howlings of the bear and the wolf alone mingled with the murmurs of the Nashua.

The death of Philip, in the following August, put an end to further hostilities. No records of modern warfare describe so great a proportional aggregate of suffering as these settlements then sustained. But the inhabitants became inured to the peculiar privations and hardships of Savage warfare, which were of infinite importance to them in their subsequent conflicts with the French and Indians. From these wars their opponents always retired with great defeat and losses. The superior prowess of civilized life prevailed at length over the rude violence of barbarian warfare, and the ancient tribes of New England were erased from the list of nations. In 1680, the re-settlement of this town was commenced; its sufferings from the Savages were renewed in the wars with the Indians and the French that followed each other in quick succession. In each of these conflicts the Inhabitants had to mourn the loss of a beloved Minister, each cut off in the beginning of his days, and his usefulness, and "their sepulchres remain with us to this day." The year 1710 terminated the story of Indian warfare in this town. Since that period but few places have had more reason for grateful praise for the peace and harmony that has prevailed within their borders. In 1708, the Rev. Mr. Prentice was ordained as the Minister of this place. During the long period of 118 years, the pulpit has been vacant but ten months, and but two other incumbents have filled the sacred desk. Through all those eventful periods, when other towns and churches were rent with dissensions, and brethren who had taken counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company, became estranged from each other, and when altar was set up against altar, no root of bitterness here sprang up to distract and divide this people. No ecclesiastical councils have been here assembled to reconcile the animosities of contending brethren, or to heal the wounds of the Church: "no grey haired synods" to mete out the measure of their faith. Notwithstanding the repeated diminutions of their extent by the formation of the several

flourishing and opulent towns within their former territory, this place still stands the first in the vicinity in population, and still maintains the proud pre-eminence of Queen among these villages.

Assembled from the various branches that sprang from this ancient stock, we congratulate the venerable Mother of our towns and our Churches, upon all the pleasing and interesting circumstances and contrasts suggested by this brief though imperfect retrospect of her history. We exhort you, fellow citizens, to a consideration of the high and awful responsibility imposed upon you by the present prosperous situation of our beloved country, and particularly the relation we bear to our fellow men of other climes, who are yet groping in ignorance, and bending beneath the yoke of slavery. Our lot is cast in an age pre-eminent above all others for high advances in mental improvement. The Government under which we live is literally a popular Government, and upon the discernment of the people depends many of our important measures. Projects of internal improvement, involving intricate questions of science, are daily presented for our consideration. The increase of the reading community demands for our public journals distinguished talent and laborious research, for these heralds of intelligence are now sought for by almost our whole population. We believe, therefore, the time is arrived, having been accelerated by a rapid increase of means, when our public schools should be placed upon a more liberal and elevated foundation; when high qualifications should be required in the instructors; when more discrimination should be used in the selection of school books; when a new zeal and higher interest should be felt upon the part of those who have the oversight of Schools. We are not desirous that all our young men should be educated as Statesmen or Philosophers. But no man is capable of acting in the selection of a ruler, unless he is acquainted with the principles of the Government that is to be administered. The general propositions of natural and moral philosophy are of importance to every citizen in his daily intercourse with his fellow men.

Think not that I am undervaluing the first principles of education: these should be laid deep in the infant's mind, and he should be led on to further attainments by more time and more liberal appropriations than have hitherto been devoted to these important objects.

I introduce this subject on this occasion, because I firmly believe it is the most useful improvement that can be drawn from the sub-

jects we have been considering. I name it in this place because this people have been among the foremost in the liberality of their appropriations for the education of their children both at public and private schools. The catalogues of our university for the last ten years bear ample testimony in support of this fact.

It will little suffice "to build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous," unless we imitate their good examples, and cherish their valued institutions. This is the most acceptable tribute we can offer to the memories of our fathers, and to this duty we are also summoned by a regard for posterity. The time and the place is fitted for high and decisive resolves. The ground we tread is holy, for it has been consecrated by the blood of heroes, of patriots, and of martyrs; beneath its turf are interred the ashes of the valiant defenders of our land, our laws, and our liberties: the air we breathe has been hallowed by the shrieks of widows, and the wailings of Rachels weeping for their first born.

FELLOW CITIZENS—We have thus traced the advancement of our country from its humble beginnings to its present state of opulence and power. We have seen the splendid fabric rising by regular gradations, under the hands of its master builders, from its lowly foundations, to a towering height of beauty and magnificence. We have seen it affording to our fathers and their descendants, through every succeeding generation, a resting place, safe and abiding. For a growth so rapid and so vast other times furnish no analogy, and other regions no precedent.

Is this the work of fancy? Is it a chimera or a dream? Is it a castle of enchantment called into existence by the fabled genii of romance, and to vanish again at the tomb of the mystic wand? Is it a palace of frost, glittering and evanescent, like the splendid bauble of the Muscovite, "as worthless as it seemed intrinsically precious?"—No, the progress of our country is no fantasy of the imagination, for the registers of our fathers point to the origin of every column, and the names of its Architects start in bold relief from every pedestal. We have seen its Tuscan foundations laid low and permanent and unyielding as the soul of the Puritan, who freighted the unpolished adamant across the wave. We have witnessed its massy Doric columns, reared by unconquerable fortitude, and cemented by the blood of valor, by a race who followed the thorny path of the Pilgrim in the wilderness, who forgot not their fathers and remembered the inestimable price of their purchase. We have seen the third race continue the growing pile by the tall and grace-

ful Ionic, whose lofty elevations exposed the edifice to the view of the nations, and rendered its sacred treasures the object of cruel rapacity. But from its vistas and its inmost recesses poured forth legions of armed men, who manfully repelled the insidious designs of its aggressors, and stripped the cumbrous Gothic appendages, *which* defaced its beauty, and marred its proportions. Left in possession of its friends, already have they erected the majestic ranks of Corinthian columns, attracting the wonder of an admiring world. Already is it enriched with the tributes of science and the arts. To its spacious Courts is attracted the wealth of every land, and the spoils of every sea. Laden with treasures of barbaric gold and eastern gems, the Merchants from afar flock to its light.

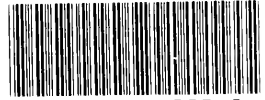
On us devolves the duty of advancing the destinies of our beloved country ; of increasing the ascending pile by columns of surpassing strength and splendor, mingling her glories with the skies, blending her fame with all that is grand and august, extending the knowledge of her freedom and her faith to the oppressed and benighted of all nations ; of adorning her columns with trophies of science won by peaceful conquest from ages far distant and climes remote ; of defending from profanation her altars and her laws, and in preparing her sons to be as pre-eminent in moral and intellectual attainments, as they now are, in the blessings of good Government. Thus may our land become the glory of the whole earth :

“ Unbounded be her joy, and endless her increase ;

“ Praise be in all her gates, and on her walls, and in her streets,

“ And in her spacious Courts, be heard Salvation.”

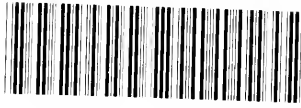
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